



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 11, 2003

For Information Contact Public Affairs
HARRIET BERNICK
Telephone: (602) 514-7736
Pager: (602) 356-0004

5 AVONDALE AND TOLLESON RESIDENTS SENTENCED TO UP TO 7 YEARS IN PRISON FOR RAMMING A GUN STORE WITH A STOLEN CHEVY BLAZER AND STEALING GUNS

PHOENIX, ARIZONA –Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, and Virginia O'Brien, Special Agent in Charge for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, announced that on August 11, 2003, the last of five defendants who burglarized a gun store after ramming it with a stolen Chevy Blazer was sentenced to prison by United States District Judge Susan R. Bolton, in Phoenix, Arizona.

The five defendants are:

1. Gabriel Limas, date of birth 11/28/78, of Avondale, Arizona, sentenced to 7 years in prison on June 30, 2003, for the offenses of Theft of Firearms From a Federally Licensed Firearms Dealer in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(u) and Felon in Possession of Firearms in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(g), after a guilty plea on April 2, 2003.
2. Carlos Cernak, date of birth 5/12/82, of Avondale, Arizona, sentenced to 7 years in prison on September 23, 2002, for the offenses of Theft of Firearms From a Federally Licensed Firearms Dealer and Felon in Possession of Firearms, after a guilty plea on June 25, 2002.
3. Derrick Pablo, date of birth 5/21/81, of Avondale, Arizona, sentenced to 3 years in prison on July 22, 2003, for the offenses of Theft of Firearms From a Federally Licensed

(MORE)

Firearms Dealer and Felon in Possession of Firearms, after a guilty plea on June 27, 2002.

4. Joey Bejarano, date of birth 12/12/81, of Avondale, sentenced to 3 years and one month in prison on July 15, 2003, for the offenses of Theft of Firearms From a Federally Licensed Firearms Dealer and Possession of Stolen Firearms in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 922(j), after a guilty plea on April 8, 2003.

5. George Castillo, date of birth 8/22/82, of Tolleson, Arizona, sentenced to 3 years in prison on August 11, 2003, for the offenses of Theft of Firearms From a Federally Licensed Firearms Dealer and Possession of Stolen Firearms, after a guilty plea on October 11, 2003.

This prosecution is the most recent success for the District of Arizona's Project Safe Neighborhood's firearms enforcement program. The effectiveness of Project Safe Neighborhoods in Arizona is based on the ability of federal, state, and local agencies to cooperate in a unified offensive that is led by United States Attorney Paul K. Charlton. Through the ongoing partnerships among federal, state, and local law enforcement like the one in this case, the United States Attorney is implementing a series of strategies that are contoured to fit the specific gun crime problems throughout Arizona. The ultimate goal of Project Safe Neighborhoods is to create safer neighborhoods by reducing gun violence and sustaining the reductions. Prosecutions such as this one are clearly a strong step in that direction.

The following facts are contained in an affidavit submitted by an ATF special agent in support of a complaint against Derrick Pablo and Carlos Cernack on September 13, 2001, and the plea agreements of the five defendants for the above noted charges. On September 12, 2001, Gabriel Limas, Carlos Cernack, Derrick Pablo, George Castillo and Joey Bejarano agreed together to steal firearms from firearms dealers. The five burglars then traveled in multiple vehicles to the premises of Straight Shooter Guns, a federally licensed firearms dealer located in Avondale, Arizona. Once at the store, they rammed a stolen Chevy Blazer into the store's plate glass door, walked through a hole the Blazer created in the doorway and then smashed glass display cases with a crow bar. The five burglars stole at least twenty of the dealer's firearms and left the damaged Blazer at the gun store. Seventeen of the stolen firearms were recovered by ATF and

(MORE)

law enforcement officers within 24 hours in Avondale, Arizona. The recovered stolen firearms included 15 handguns and 2 rifles, one of which was a semi-automatic assault weapon.

At the time of the burglary, Gabriel Limas had a prior 1997 felony conviction for Endangerment, Carlos Cernak, had a prior 1999 felony conviction for Attempted Aggravated Assault, and Derrick Pablo had a prior 1998 felony conviction for Burglary in the Third Degree. All three of the prior convictions occurred in the Superior Court of Arizona, Maricopa County.

All of the defendants except George Castillo were in federal custody at the time of their sentencings. Castillo was ordered by Judge Bolton to self-surrender to the Federal Bureau of Prisons by noon on Friday, September 12, 2003. Judge Bolton also ordered that the five defendants to jointly pay \$22,722 in restitution to the victims of their crimes.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Avondale Police Department, Tolleson Police Department, Glendale Police Department and Phoenix Police Department.

CASE NUMBERS: CR-01-915-PHX-SRB and CR-02-660-PHX-SRB

RELEASE NUMBER: 2003-144

#